

## Brown Deer School District

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The Brown Deer School District, a rural farming area three generations ago, is now an urban village of 12,479 tucked in just north of the City of Milwaukee. Considered part of Milwaukee's "North Shore," the Village of Brown Deer is primarily a middle-income community. It is home to people with a wide range of incomes who live in a variety of housing, mostly small homes, condominiums, and apartments. With its relatively affordable housing, the Village of Brown Deer is a "first step out of the city" for many families.

The Village of Brown Deer is a racially mixed community, with about 25 percent of its population being people of color. This is paralleled in the student population of about 1,750, which includes students enrolled through the Chapter 220 program. About two-thirds of the students of color are African American; slightly less than one-third are Asian American or Pacific Islanders, and a small number are Hispanic.

The Brown Deer School District operates four schools: one four-year high school (about 560 students), one middle school serving grades 5 through 8 (about 550 students), and two elementary schools (Algonquin and Dean) serving prekindergarten through fourth-grade children. Brown Deer students are served by a staff of 135. The district has undergone a major transition in administrative staff, with the district administrator, assistant administrator, curriculum coordinator, and building principals recently hired.

Because it is a small community, the Village of Brown Deer and the School District of Brown Deer are able to work closely together, even combining such services as public nursing. A revitalized community coalition, Brown Deer Prevention Plus: A Community Awareness Coalition, was begun three years ago and is playing an increasingly important role in supporting prevention education in the school and community. This partnership helps to consistently promote positive values for young people.

### Implementation Strategies

#### *Staff Leadership*

Leadership from school staff, particularly guidance counselors, has played an important role in the district's development of health and prevention programs. For example, the middle school counselor, Bobbi Polacheck, also served as middle school AOD coordinator and, along with other school staff, was instrumental in revitalizing Brown Deer Prevention Plus and obtaining funding to support district and community prevention efforts.

#### *Regional Assistance*

District staff have worked closely with Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 1 in developing its prevention and wellness programs. Staff participate in CESA 1 AOD Coordinators' meetings, where representatives from Brown Deer and other schools meet to obtain materials, share information and effective strategies, and support each other in promoting wellness and prevention. Brown Deer staff have also attended relevant CESA 1 training events.

## **Funding Support**

In addition to utilizing its Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act entitlements, the district successfully competed for a State AOD Program Grant for 1996-98. It received a total of \$32,000 over a two-year period to gather, analyze, and disseminate a survey on students' high-risk behaviors and to use the resulting data to assess and plan programs, provide staff training and student leadership training, and to support the community coalition and parent education.

## **Healthy School Environment**

Over the past several years, district staff have studied Quality School concepts and Effective Schools correlates. The following correlates have become an important aspect of establishing healthy school environments. They include the following:

- commonly understood school purpose and goals
- schoolwide emphasis on instruction
- warm, responsive teachers with high expectations
- frequent monitoring of student progress
- strong instructional leadership

The district initiated site-based management teams in each school to fulfill the district mission of educating all students to high levels of academic performance while fostering growth in physical fitness, life skills, and positive social behaviors and attitudes. The new administration initiated a strategic plan with active committees that focus on five areas: discipline, world class standards, staff development, "Success for All" communication, and buildings and grounds. Students and community residents are members of these planning committees.

Because the school community itself is small, a "personal approach" to students and their families prevails, and district staff express pride in this approach. The middle school guidance counselor describes a "caring and concern of the day-to-day culture" in the schools that is not always adequately reflected in written policies. For example, she describes how the district recently developed a written "Crisis Plan" that was "mostly a matter of putting down on paper what was already done." Teachers and other staff are available after school hours, welcome parents, and communicate frequently with them via newsletters and personal

conferences. In addition, each school has a handbook outlining expectations and rules that will foster a safe and nurturing environment for all students.

The district makes special-needs populations a priority, as demonstrated by its "Success for All" committee of concerned parents, teachers, and staff. The Brown Deer schools also provide opportunities for students of diverse abilities to work with and learn from each other through peer mentoring and tutoring.

Overall, staff members in the Brown Deer School District pride themselves on their personal approach to students and their families. Precisely because the district is small, parents and teachers quickly get to know one another. School staff encourage parents to visit with teachers and communicate frequently with them, an approach enhanced by a new telecommunication system that provides teachers with telephones in each classroom, voice mail, and e-mail.

## **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

The Brown Deer School District is in the early stages of systematically developing its K-12 health and prevention curriculum. A recent staff survey on what is being taught at various grade levels will assist district staff in further development.

Currently, elementary students (K-4) receive some health instruction on such topics as accident prevention, nutrition, personal health, disease prevention, and AODA from homeroom teachers using a designated health textbook. Developmental guidance lessons on social/emotional issues, problem solving, and protective behaviors are conducted in grades 2-4. Guidance counselors and classroom teachers team on the Second Step Program, an anger management and violence prevention program offered in grades 1-4 on a limited-term basis.

At the middle school level (grades 5-8), a series of developmental guidance lessons on conflict resolution, communication and relationship skills, stereotyping, and appreciating diversity are presented to fifth graders by the guidance counselor. The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program on ATODA prevention is presented in the fifth grade, and human growth and development instruction is conducted jointly by the physical education teacher and school nurses in the fifth and sixth grades. The Lion's Quest (Skills for Adolescence) Program, which

encompasses social/emotional health, decision making, AOD issues, and community service, is required in the sixth through eighth grades. The sessions, facilitated by both a classroom teacher and a subject matter specialist, provide opportunities for students to interact in smaller groups and increase their level of comfort and familiarity with school staff. Quest Program materials and teacher training are fully funded by the Brown Deer Lions.

At the high school level, a required ninth-grade health class focuses on prevention and ATODA issues. Some elective courses, including biology, family and consumer education, and a class on relationship skills, provide additional coverage of health and prevention issues.

## **Pupil Services**

The Brown Deer School District employs one full-time psychologist, five guidance counselors, and two intern counselors who provide service to the four school buildings. The Village of Brown Deer provides nursing services, with a nurse available in the schools three mornings a week. Nursing staff assist with facilitating Student Assistance Program groups, conduct a variety of screenings and home visits, teach a course on babysitting, and provide services to support district staff health and wellness.

Although the district guidance counselors meet semi-regularly, district Pupil Services staff do not meet regularly. Instead, each building has a team, including Pupil Services staff, which meets weekly to perform what are traditionally Pupil Services activities, including discussing concerns related to individuals or groups. At the elementary and middle school levels, they are called Building Consultation Teams (BCT); at the high school, it is called the Student Services Team. Guidance counselors provide leadership for the elementary and middle school teams, while an assistant principal (formerly a counselor) provides leadership at the high school.

Individuals or groups of students are referred to building teams for a variety of academic, health, social, or emotional issues. The team facilitator invites other school staff, as appropriate, to attend the meeting. This may include teaching staff, the principal, a case manager, speech pathologist, or school nurse. Thus, staff working as team members vary at times depending on the student's grade level and need. The team discusses and defines the problem and develops an action plan to

address it. The plan may include recommendations for schedule changes, alternative teaching strategies, parent conferences, referrals within the school district for special programming, or referrals to community resources.

## **Student Programs**

The Brown Deer School District offers a comprehensive array of student activities. This includes a full range of Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association-approved athletic opportunities for male and female students (soccer, cross country, football, swimming, basketball, cheerleading, and so forth). Co-curricular activities include, among others, debate, forensics, DECA, Science Olympiad, foreign language clubs, National Honor Society, and math and computer teams.

At the middle school, club activities are offered twice weekly at study times during the last three-quarters of the school year. Interested staff members facilitate the club activities, and students are scheduled into areas of interest on a space-available basis. Activities have included chess, holiday projects, computers and software, card games, stock market, aerobic dancing, first aid, quilting, volleyball, weightlifting, and aerobic dancing.

## **Student Assistance Program**

Brown Deer has a very active Student Assistance Program (SAP) in grades K-12. Although the program began with a focus on ATOD, it has broadened to include support for many of the social and emotional issues that affect youth and inhibit academic growth. SAP facilitators represent administration as well as health education and other teaching staff. Compensatory time is provided for teachers who facilitate student groups.

At the beginning of the school year, guidance counselors inform all students in kindergarten through eighth grade about the availability of SAP groups and wellness model programs. Middle and high school students also receive fliers throughout the year describing these programs. Students may sign up voluntarily or be referred by school staff or parents to these groups at any time during the year.

SAP groups include the following:

**Friendship:** Friendship groups focus on building healthy relationship skills among elementary and middle school students. Youth who choose to par-

ticipate in this group may feel they have difficulty making friends or may often find themselves in disagreements with others. Youth who simply want to get along better with others and/or want to build additional friendship skills may also choose to join the group.

**Concerned Others:** The Concerned Others group is a support group for youth who are concerned about a family member or loved one who abuses drugs or alcohol. Groups are confidential and are available across all grade levels. Students have the opportunity to share their experiences and fears, to learn coping skills, and to find healthy ways to take care of themselves. This group provides a safety net for youth who are affected by someone else's drug or alcohol abuse and aids them in building resiliency.

**Grief and Loss:** These support groups are held for students experiencing loss in their lives. Several groups serve youth from the first through the twelfth grade to meet the needs and cognitive abilities of students. A loss is self-defined and may include, for example, the death of a loved one; the divorce of parents; or, for a teen, the break-up of a relationship.

**Stress:** This group, which is available to students in grades 7-12, provides education and practice in taking care of oneself when under stress. Stress reducing techniques, such as deep breathing, are taught.

**Insight:** Any student who is concerned about personal use of substances may choose to join this group as a means of "going straight" with the support of peers.

**Relationship Awareness:** The relationship awareness group is for students in grades 7-12. Focused on the developmental and social needs of older students, it provides an environment where students can learn new social skills or refine those they already have. This group provides an opportunity for students to learn about healthy relationships and how to build them. Students also have the opportunity to explore what they want from their relationships with friends, family, and peers.

**Eating Disorders:** This group is offered at the high school level for youth who find their behavior is controlled by their eating habits. Students

gain support from peers in learning healthy behaviors and overcoming compulsions.

**Pregnancy Support:** This support group is for students who are pregnant. Teens attending this group learn critical life skills about child development and care, appropriate decision making, and parenting.

## Leadership Programs

**Kids Helping Kids:** The program began eight years ago to ease fifth graders' transition to middle school and currently involves 30-35 eighth graders acting as natural leaders in providing mentors and information to fifth graders. Overall, the program provides service learning within the context of school as community. The program has two other major objectives: to improve the climate at the middle school and to provide leadership training and opportunities for eighth graders. Projects include sharing a breakfast with new students, dispensing locker signs, and conducting a tour for new students on the first day of school; tutoring students in grades 2-4; reading stories into tapes for visually impaired students; and planning and implementing Red Ribbon Week activities.

**Student Council:** These councils operate at both the middle and high schools. The groups make suggestions regarding school rules and policy, promote good school citizenship and school spirit, and sponsor social and philanthropic activities.

## Adult Programs

### *Student Assistance Program (SAP) Staff Training*

Tremendous support exists for staff training around Student Assistance Programs (SAP), with the district willingly providing substitute teachers so educators can participate in this form of staff development. Teachers are equally enthused about participation and staff development in prevention and resiliency areas. While most teachers have received Core Training, the Brown Deer School District continues to move toward the goal of having all district teachers core trained, emphasizing ATODA issues and the impact of ATOD on youth and their families. A high number of staff have participated in facilitator training for SAP. In 1997-98, nine school district staff, a youth liai-



son with the Village of Brown Deer police department, and two village nurses were trained. The district's Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act entitlement covered the cost of their training.

### *Employee Assistance Program*

Referral and support service are provided for employees in the areas of marital counseling, financial management, chemical dependency, and other personal concerns.

### *Parent Programs*

The district provides a variety of educational programs for parents, including guest speakers on such topics as parent/child communication, developmental concerns, and AOD issues. The district psychologist and guidance staff also conducted a series of parenting programs based on the Johnson Institute's *Parenting for Prevention* (1997). Parents signed up for one or more of the sessions, which covered such topics as limit setting and communication skills. An additional copy of the videotapes used in the sessions was available at school and at the Village Library for parents to check out and view at home. Parent participation in these sessions greatly exceeded staff expectations. Finally, State AOD Program Grant funding enabled the district to purchase parent information materials and establish parent resource centers in the schools.

## **Family and Community Connections**

Brown Deer's Student Assistance Programs were begun about 15 years ago by a group of concerned community members working with school staff. While the district's programs continued and grew, the community component dissolved over time. In 1995, the district's Student Assistance Program coordinators invited community members to join them in a renewed effort to combine resources and focus on fostering healthy youth. Thus, Brown Deer Prevention Plus: A Community Awareness Coalition was begun. Prevention Plus members included school staff, the local police chief, the Village Public Health Department director, a school board member, three parents, and

a local clergyman. The committee has grown to about 15 members, with designated seats to ensure representation from various sectors of the Brown Deer community.

In 1996, the middle school guidance counselor wrote a State AOD Program Grant that provided Brown Deer Prevention Plus with funding for their action plan. The grant funded training for the committee in team planning, community outreach, and current issues relative to youth; for staff on ATOD issues and prevention; and for students on peer mediation. It also funded development, administration, and analysis of a survey of youth risk behaviors in grades 7-12. Results of the survey have been presented to the committee, school administrators, the school board, and the public via newspaper articles and parent bulletins from the school. These results will guide future Prevention Plus planning and district curriculum development. Finally, the grant helped provide some of the parent support and education described in the previous section.

## **Future Directions**

The Brown Deer School District goals are to gain information about community needs, evaluate present programs and activities, and plan for future prevention projects. Because the district is such an integral part of the Village of Brown Deer, it sees community education as a natural outgrowth of their relationship. Consequently, the school district and village are eager to develop an action plan for community education. As the two move toward a structure offering enriched learning opportunities, the district expects to remain stable in its current programming. To ensure that the quality of education and community involvement continue to meet the expectations and needs of students and community members, the district will continue to evaluate prevention programs in the village and schools.

The School District of Brown Deer is seeking creative funding for additional programming and education. In addition, it is working cooperatively with the village to coordinate funding efforts and find innovative ways to provide improved youth programming and community education. An example is that the Village of Brown Deer is funding a full-time Police Liaison position. That person will be housed in the schools and be accessible to staff and students.